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## **Technology, "green jobs" spotlighted at USDA Jobs Roundtable**

JACKSON, Tenn., January 20, 2010 - With unemployment rates still above ten percent across the region, families and businesses in West Tennessee has been especially hard hit by the historic economic downturn. Last Thursday business and other community leaders met federal, state and local economic development officials at the University of Tennessee Extension Experiment Station in Jackson to discuss what can be done to speed recovery and create long-term economic stability across the state.

Mark Chandler of the Tennessee Career Center in Jackson presented an overview of economic conditions. Of the 13 Local Workforce Investment Areas in Tennessee, the three that cover rural West Tennessee continue to have the highest average unemployment rates, in excess of 13 percent.

Though most sectors have been impacted by the downturn, manufacturing, construction and trade, transportation and utilities have all suffered declines of 23 percent or more during the last year. The one bright spot has been education and health services, where the number of jobs increased by 6.9 percent statewide.

Dr. Jack Laser of Jackson State Community College then presented an overview of business development opportunities for which West Tennessee is geographically or otherwise well positioned to take advantage. The discussion that followed built on his foundation citing the region's proximity to a large number of investments being made in major new auto manufacturing plants.

According to several participants West Tennessee companies like Goodyear, Unilever, Carlisle, Proctor and Gamble, and several locally owned food production companies are already expanding or rehiring. State Economic and community Development Assistant Commissioner Rick Meredith made the point that in Tennessee 92 percent of jobs are with small businesses.

With a number of new "green" companies having recently announced expansion in Tennessee, there was a lively discussion about where USDA and local leaders can help develop the regional workforce to create a business environment that attracts and nurtures these "jobs of the future." In addition to the Mega-Site and Solar Farm currently under development in Haywood County, Paul Van Hoesen of cTechnology.com explained an initiative helping connect rural workers with technology jobs.

cTech's first "Digital-Factory" recently opened in Perry County and has already started putting people to work in skilled jobs across the country. The concept allows workers to share space and the resources needed to support technology jobs. The company is working with a number of West Tennessee counties on this and other technology-based projects. More information is available at [www.ctrtechnology.org](http://www.ctrtechnology.org).

UT Martin's Chancellor Tom Rakes also announced the university is launching a new initiative to ensure that every graduate, regardless of major, meets an advanced standard of technological literacy.

The event was co-hosted by USDA Rural Development State Director Bobby Goode and USDA Farm Service Agency State Exec. Director Gene Davidson. The standing room only crowd included State commissioner of Labor and Workforce Development James Neeley, representatives for the state's congressional delegation, business owners, private and non-profit lenders, farmers, regional economic developers, chamber leaders and nine county and city Mayors. State legislators were unable to attend due to the special session underway in Nashville, but several have asked for a copy of the report to be written summarizing the input from participants.

Input is still being received in writing from attendees and many who were not able to attend. The results will be compiled and made available for everyone interested online next week at [www.rurdev.usda/TN](http://www.rurdev.usda/TN).

USDA Rural Development invests in jobs, businesses, community infrastructure, homeownership and affordable rental housing in rural communities. Last year Rural Development assisted more than 866,000 Tennessee families and businesses with more than \$619 million in affordable loans, loan guarantees and grants.

For more information on Rural Development programs available in West Tennessee contact the Rural Development Area Office in Jackson at 731-668-2091 x2, toll free at 1-800-342-3149 extension 1495 or the Union City Area Office at 731-885-6480 ext. 4, toll free at 1-800-342-3149 extension 1497. Find all Tennessee offices and more online at [www.rurdev.usda.gov/tn](http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/tn).

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